

MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY- WHAT A CONCEPT!

Thank you FCC for giving the public the chance to submit a local media report card.

Somehow many of us along the way got the idea that the media had a moral responsibility to the public. Fueled by the movie culture we can easily picture Julia Roberts uncovering a scandal that risks lives. Several brushes with fatality occur before she finds a conscientious young reporter who breaks the story. A few powerful people are jailed and a happy ending is achieved. This is the distorted vision that many of us have of our media.

Breaking a story is not what the public would imagine. Our local media has systematically avoided confrontation with anyone or group with any power. They give the macho side the first say and the majority of the airtime. Occasionally a sentence from the public or public interest group makes it in to give the story the appearance of balance. Rarely are the important facts from the runt side presented and the recipients of the media's propaganda never see the full picture.

For example: Last October the Army (very powerful side) set ablaze what turned out to be almost 1400 acres of land contaminated with hazardous military waste. The public (much weaker side) along with over eight public interest groups pointed out the health and safety risks, showed evidence of crimes and did everything in their power to alert anyone who could help. No response was made to incriminating evidence. Local media opted instead to highlight and parade the Army's carefully concocted and weak rationale for burning. The media failed to address the risks and most importantly alert the public.

My mind goes back to a much less toxic burn that happened accidentally only a couple of months prior to the much worse planned burn. Staying out of the area because of an asthmatic daughter I phoned the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District and spoke with Janet Brennan asking if it was safe to return. Ms. Brennan said that it was NOT safe to come back and that the particulate matter exceeded safe levels. We stayed away NOT due to any media warning. I could not help but worry for the many that had not called the Air District and the fact that 60,000 U.S. residents per year die from breathing particulates at or below legally allowed levels. What about the approximately 6 percent of Monterey County's residents (about 22,000 people) already suffering from asthma? I worried about the children playing soccer or softball not knowing that they were exposing themselves to genuine health risks.

Why would parents expose their children to health risks?

Answer: Because they were not aware.

Why were they not aware?

Answer: Because our local media allowed the community's health to be put in jeopardy.

There may not be a happy ending in this story.

Please make the media accountable to the public.